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THE ART UNION

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THE ART UNION.

OWING to the illness of the editor, and the absence of the officers of the Art Union on their summer vacations, it was impossible to get out our October number on time. Trusting with confidence in the good nature of our subscribers, we make the present issue do service for both October and November.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS.

MR. J. W. CASILEAR'S sketch takes us, as far as black and white go, to Rogers' Slide, one of the most charming views of that charming Lake George.

Mr. T. W. Wood's sketch is from his picture that was in the Louisville exhibition. It lacks the subtlety of expression that constitutes the chief charm of the original.

Mr. J. Wells Champney's page of seaside sketches remind one vividly and pleasantly of familiar types that are always to be met "by the deep sea and music in its roar."

Another of our most accomplished pen and ink draughtsmen, Kruseman Van Elten, furnishes us with a sketch of his picture, "A Village Road Near Ellenvil'e, N. Y." The illuminated poem from *Punch* speaks for itself, and our imaginative illuminator has added to the original text quite as much as he received from it.

A CONVERSATION.

MR. GOODWILL comes into the studio of his friend, the painter Ceno, and after a hearty salutation, proceeds, as is his custom, to look about the room for such work as the artist may have done since his last visit. He examines what is in progress on the easel, and then catches a glimpse of a sketch put somewhat to one side. Taking it up with manifest interest, and giving it attentive study, he comes out at last with the question: "Say, my good friend, when did you make this? It is a most excellent subject."

"You think so? I have had that for a great while; it is several years old, like some others of the same character, hidden away among my papers. In fact, it is too good a subject, and for this reason I have never attempted to convert the sketch into a picture."

"Is that the case? But surely, you can scarcely be in earnest. You have never done anything better. The *idea* is so fine, not to mention the composition. There are splendid possibilities in that subject. You certainly ought to give it a more worthy and permanent shape."

"But what's the use? I cannot afford to paint what

would never sell. It costs money to paint pictures, and this subject would require a good-sized canvas, an expensive frame, and other outlay. You know very well the state of affairs that rules at present; that we have, artists and people alike, been gradually subsiding into utter indifference as to thought in art—regarding subject—and a race of model philosophers has evolved the novel notion that *thought* spoils a picture for a work of pure art, which, according to their definition, is something independent of, or perhaps even militating against, unmixed æsthetics as required by the highest canons of art. In fact, French example, that is prolific in downward gravitating theories, has long ago excited the criticism, 'A Frenchman cares about the *manner* before the *matter*.' We have come to the same condition, and the artist is forced, may be against his better instincts and convictions, to yield for the sake of bread and butter. You know personal and family needs are very imperative, and the heroism necessary to hold out against popular dictates when they affect a man's living in this expensive age, is rather a scarce article. For that reason I put my fine thoughts into my portfolio, look them over once in awhile, not without a regretful sigh, and endeavor to suit the prevailing taste by studying naturalism and *technique*, and so meet the demand of the market."

"But I am of the opinion that you view the case from the darkest side. The real condition is not quite so black. Indeed, I believe we are even now on the edge of a transition to better, more common-sense, ideas; that the crisis is passing, and a healthy practice returning."

"You are very hopeful. But by what 'signs of the times' do you predict so desirable a change?"

"Ah! perhaps as a layman in art matters, with no small share of love for an interest in art, I am more free to look about and notice these 'signs of the times' and give them careful consideration. You see, I have been watching these many years, change after change in taste and fashion, each running its due course like any epidemic—for we Americans cannot do things coolly, nor this nineteenth century go slower than the express train and telegraph—and this little history is replete with many useful reflections. You recollect how single-minded were the men who had the honor of being the pioneers of art in this country: the Copleys and Weirs and Allstons and Coles, and how little troubled they were with baneful theories such as now distract their successors. You recollect also with what intellectual and high moral promise they started Art on this Western continent; how thoughtful were many of their productions, so that, for epic grasp and poetic force

and grace the works of these later times have never quite come up to them, although we are rather given to self-laudation, and fancy these men 'old fogies.' At least this is *my* solid conviction. Now according to so auspicious a beginning, we ought to have grown in mind, and in depth and richness of feeling, as well as in technical skill and scientific accuracy. But we have gone away from that. Passing through a variety of phases, with a good deal of noise and 'hurrah,' at least a great many are now where they have no more a valuable story to tell, or an important lesson to give, but, swamped in naturalism, the 'how' of the Frenchman has nearly crushed out the 'what;' the artist has become a painter of things instead of ideas, and very trivial, commonplace, or vulgar things often. Mind, in the higher sense, no more rules, but matter is enthroned; the soul is no longer taken into account, only the senses. The artist has unlearned and forgotten to look beneath the surface of things and to divine their inner meaning—to be a Seer and a Prophet—a discloser of the secrets of God and the wants of the human heart, and no longer is he an interpreter of the heart's irrepressible longings."

"Very severe, and not very cheerful, because the truth of your judgment cannot be disputed. But by it you only confirm my own impression, and justify the practice forced upon me, and no doubt many others by dire necessity. I see no remedy from this grave and complex difficulty. It is caused, certainly in part, by our fast and impatient nineteenth century living. Men have no more time for thought. Haste and the multiplicity of crowding impressions urge them on more and more to superficiality. Besides, I fear there is a still deeper cause—the skeptical and flippant spirit now almost universal. The taste for soberness, quietness and meditative earnestness, has died out with the past generations. Living in a whirl and rush, without chance of repose, whips out with the harlequin's pea-bladder all serious inclinations. And so, when people visit exhibitions, their object is amusement, not instruction. They weary if the artist invites them to follow his preaching patiently and with a docile mind. Least of all, are they inclined to 'make churches out of their parlors,' as a lady of fashion remarked to a friend of mine who committed the unfashionable impropriety of giving a religious painting in her parlor the central place. All your admissions only confirm what I so sadly feel and groan under."

"No doubt, my pessimistic philosopher. But I am not to the end of my remarks. So far I have only made a statement of premises. There is an imperative sequel to them, and in these fast moving times, sequels push much more closely upon the heels of premises than in former centuries. Revolutions of thoughts, changes of convictions, also move with lightning speed, like our engines. You must have noticed how few years it takes for a popular craze to run its course, from beginning to end; and by observing the thickening indications, a cheering hope cannot be expressed that we have nearly arrived at the boundary line of another, and let us believe a more healthy artistic era."

"I should rejoice if I could share your belief. However, being beset and hard pressed by real necessities as a

professional, I do not yet penetrate the secret of your meaning."

"It is easily explained. Our safety lies in the fact that humanity and human wants are now and always will be what they were three and four hundred years ago, during that halcyon period of art on which I have with pleasure and instruction heard you discourse enthusiastically again and again. Thank fortune, we cannot stifle long the mighty yearnings of the great human heart. It is true certain classes of people by persistent effort succeed to a marvelous degree in this miserable business, but their mad fashions finally stifle them, and so does vice of any kind, or inordinate pleasure and greed and unscrupulous ambition where indulged. But the great human heart in the many beats strong and loud and will assert its claims despite all rivals and enemies. It has its longings, and its pains; its sorrows, its outreachings, its eternal wants that go to the very root of its being and inhabit every fibre of its constitution. It has a hunger of its own, craving to be satisfied, although the poor thing is often fed with strange kinds of food by fatal ignorance as to what the heart actually stands in need of. And so it has come to pass that some, having a clearer knowledge perhaps of what their individual hearts wanted, have gone through our frequent exhibitions, and on leaving have complained, in print or by word of mouth, that they were in search of bread and were offered—well, something else. They recognized in art a mode of speech for their benefit and instruction; the artist being the teacher, the prophet, the priest of a sanctuary. They would treat with scorn the poet who insisted perpetually on discoursing of grammar and empty rhetoric, the mere clothing of ideas—necessary, but not superior. They fondly expected to find in these exhibitions, at least here and there, the real gospel of human life, a message of sympathy with human needs, with the deep outcry for peace and consolation, for help in the perplexities of earthborn struggle, for heart-sores in the midst of a cold and selfish world; a friend and companion to take away the emptiness which now and then discovers itself in every human breast and which cannot endure to be left unfilled. They tired—as who does not?—of admiring forever the gymnastic dexterity, the æsthetic dress-goods in gilt frames challenging admiring recognition from the crowded walls. All mere externalities pall on the taste; sooner or later their superficial nature discovers itself. And this voice of complaint has become louder with the years, and more general. It has now become a dominant note in our own organ (THE ART UNION) and I am convinced it will refuse to be silenced. It is the morning star of a better day. As the indications are prominent that home art is to receive presently its rightful recognition and support, and that the flunkysism which despises American art in favor of foreign, has had its day, so also will mind and soul triumph in the contest with heartless egotism, exhibitions of dexterity, and shallow though brilliant display. And very little time, I feel sure, will show us the thrice welcome day."

The painter, during this rather lengthy speech of his friend, had, while listening attentively, plied his brush.

He remained silent for several minutes, and then suddenly turning, with a strange eagerness in his tone and manner, propounded the enigmatical question: "*Who is to be the Luther in this crisis?*"

"My friend, you startle me. How shall I know?—But your question lays the foundation of a pyramid, a tremendous historical basis. To be sure, how often it has happened that the people were ahead of their appointed leaders, crying out for reform! We have now such a case. Material is fast piling up. Ours is a momentous age full of mysterious developments. Certain it is that in the upheavals of mind, passing like a prolonged earthquake over the nations, art must take her share. And in such a struggle of giant forces, it is nothing less than criminal to waste opportunity in childish or trivial externals; to fritter away strength on the millinery of art; to be contended with handicraft, substituting body for soul, galvanizing a fictitious life into the cadaver, deceiving a shallow public and the shallower artist. It is an outrage on the sacred function of art—one of the noblest benefactions mankind has received—and a defrauding of those whose right it is to expect from the artist that he shall be to them a teacher and an apostle of truth; including, as a matter of course, that most holy and which comprises man's undying interests. Indeed, look closely into this subject, and *this* truth is nothing less than the very keystone to the arch of all worthy and good human endeavor, in æsthetics as well as in life itself. But I am getting probably too far into this labyrinthine sanctuary for the public taste; and no man ought always to utter all his thoughts."

"Yes, yes! you are touching a serious matter. It invites careful thinking and talking as one of the root problems of this age, heaving with solemn momentous conflict. I have read art and other history, and the reading has forced upon me some very important considerations not unlike the hints you have thrown out. I wish you would express yourself sometime more fully, because I feel that what you have advanced are merely outlines, and that a great deal more lies in the domain of this subject. At any rate, you have given me new hope and courage, and may be I shall yet paint a picture from the sketch you did me the kindness to commend so highly."

J. A. O.

AN ART THOUGHT.

"It is a vice of criticism that it is impossible to admire a man for doing well what he wished to do, without either praising him for aims he never had, or blaming him for the absence of qualities he avoided and an ideal he does not appreciate. A man has in him to do what he sincerely feels and only that well. Criticism which is out of sympathy with his point of view only embitters the war of schools and misleads and discourages the individual."—R. A. M. Stevenson on "Art in France."

SOME PRICES OF PICTURES IN 1650.

M. DE COSNAC, in his "*Souvenirs of the Reign of Louis XIV.*," publishes a curious correspondence of M. de Bordeaux, the French ambassador to England, with Cardinal Mazarin, relative to the purchase of the art treasures of the collection of Charles 1st, sold by order of Parliament in 1650.

The prices paid for some of these were as follows, viz.:

For the Antiope of Corregio.....	4,500 francs.
" Venus of Titian.....	7,000 "
" St. Michael and St. George of Raphael....	2,000 "
" Portrait of a Young Man, by Raphael....	1,000 "
" The Triumph of Titus, by Julio Romano.	800 "

WHAT MAKES AN ARTIST.

EVERY artist of established reputation has constant applications made to him to decide whether such and such a young person has talent enough to justify his studying art; and the proof furnished in which a judgment is to be based is usually a few very slight sketches made in a hazy manner with charcoal or daubs of paint.

On such proof no matter how much multiplied, no thinking man can base any judgment. They are merely evidences of an imitative habit, often strong in young persons who may lose it entirely later in life.

If the object in studying art be the acquirement of an additional means of education, or for the amusement of the student and his friends, we may safely encourage every person to its study. A knowledge of shapes and an appreciation of colors can be got in no way so surely as by drawing and painting, and this knowledge and appreciation helps wonderfully in making us understand and enjoy everything about us. No one who has not tried to paint, can understand the constantly developing sense of the beauty of nature which is produced by the attempt to imitate it upon canvass. Therefore we say, let every young person learn to draw and paint.

But when it comes to studying Art seriously as a life pursuit, the case is different. Great artists are very rare; even good artists are few in number, and when we pause to think of the reason, we find that it must be so. The production of a great statue or picture involves the use of different sets of faculties which are rarely combined. In no other vocation is a man required to be at the same time two things so different as an artist must be. He must be at once a poet and a mechanic. His imagination must set before him an ideal, and his hand must have the cunning to execute the shapes and colors which will express that ideal. Now the imagination of a great artist must not only be lofty but very vivid, for it must enter into every detail. He may pass over no portion as the poet may, and leave it undefined, for the vacancy would be at once discovered. And the hand of the artist must be so trained as to be ready for every emergency. What workman in the world is so dexterous as a good painter?

To become an artist the student must have these qualifications. First, imagination, an insight; this will point out to him the road he is to take, it will separate the essential and the true from the unimportant and the false. He must have quickness of observation and a good memory; he must have diligence, perseverance and some mechanical dexterity.

"Science is a part of art," says Goethe, "but the artist must have the whole." The more a man knows, the better artist he will be; but knowledge alone will not make an artist; something in addition is required which we may call imagination, or delicacy of perception or the Divine Spark. It is all the same thing under different names. Without it all the science in the world will not make an artist, but the science is also required, and that comes through study, through persevering observation of the phenomena of Nature.

L.